

# *Miserable Principles*



# Miserable Principles

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This article will look at a scripture from the book of Galatians where the Apostle Paul is telling the Christian believers not to turn back to “weak and miserable principles”. The NIV reads:

**Gal 4:9 NIV** - *But now that you know God--or rather are known by God--how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?*

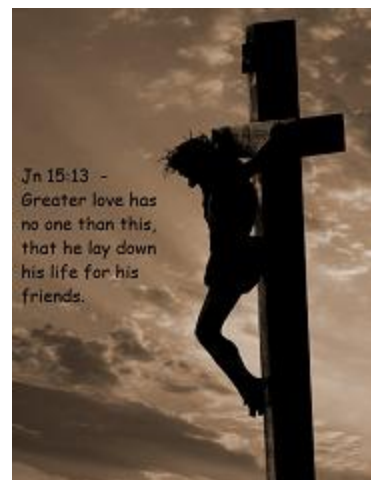
The reason this is relevant today is that there continues to be much debate about following God’s commandments, edicts, precepts and even about His laws. Unfortunately, the debates are not amongst non-believers, but rather Christian believers. We must ask ourselves what weak and miserable principles can Paul be talking about ... some say the law, others say the commandments, and others that the Old Testament writings. One thing is sure; Paul is telling the Galatians not to return to those “weak and miserable principles” after receiving Christ. We can read from Paul’s letter that the Galatians were being coerced into following doctrine which required them to engage in certain types of rituals in order to receive God’s favor, grace, and even to experience a demonstration of His power.

The goal of this article is not to promote disobedience to God’s commands, edicts and precept or that we can earn His grace, love or salvation by doing good.

## Earning His Love

It is important for us to discuss first the love God has for us, not as believers, but as His children. Understanding God’s love is the foundation of understanding in this topic and our relationship to our Heavenly Father. You cannot earn God’s love or His grace ... His grace comes because of His love for us. God has grace for us because of His love for us, not that He loves us because of His grace. Grace comes from God’s love and He does not love Christian’s more than He loves a non-believer. This is evident in His work at the cross.

**Jn 15:13 NIV** - *Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*



If Jesus laid down His life for us when we were still dead in our sins, He committed the greatest act of love when we were unbelievers and dirty rags. The work at the cross was the most valuable free gift we will ever receive and it was given because of God's love for us as His children. As it is with our earthly children, they can be a source of joy or disappointment, but we still love them because they are our children, it is this way with our heavenly Father and how He feels about us. We feel this way about our children, because He put His fatherly love in us for our children.

God demonstrated His love for us by His sacrifice at the cross. If this is the greatest love, then you cannot do anything that will have Him love you more. It is common for us Christians to forget that he loves the Muslim, Buddhist and the Atheist all the same as the Christian. The work at the cross was for everyone who was dead in their sins, ... that is ... all of mankind. And He continues to love us all and He brings rain on the righteous and unrighteous even to this day. He will bless an unbeliever and provide for them as a Father, as He will a Christian believer.

## *Doing Good*

Know that God's love for us cannot grow, since His love was at its greatest point before we were Christians. His love also does not decrease, He is Love! Unfortunately, Christians tend to gloss over God's desire for us to deny our sinful nature, because of His love and grace. His grace at the cross was not so we would continue to be slaves to sin and depravity, or so we would soft-soap sin because He loves us.

We cannot do enough good to earn His love, grace or salvation. He gave His love, grace and salvation to all mankind at the cross ... not just Christians. We become Christians by believing in Jesus as our Lord and striving to live Christ-like lives. The word Christian means Christ-like and we should strive to be like Jesus, our Lord or He is not our Lord. Jesus even said in Luke 6:46, "Why do you call me "Lord, Lord" and do not do what I say?"

God has never and will never retract His love and grace from all of mankind, non-believers and Christians alike. His love and grace were extended at Calvary and remain. Unfortunately, there is little emphasis on doing the good work God planned for us. Jesus says it like this:

**Mat 25:40 NIV** - *"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*

*And the Apostle John said:*

**1Jn 3:16 NIV** - *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*

There are two main focuses of “doing good”. One is internally focused on us refusing to engage in sin, whether intentional or unintentional, all “wrong doing” is sin. And the other is externally focused at serving others. These are Old Testament principles which Jesus taught, “do not sin” and “do good to others”.



When someone says you are being legalistic for pursuing good and striving to do what is right as a part of your Christian life, they are simply wrong. It is what our salvation and His grace are designed to produce fruitful lives. Remember we cannot earn His love or grace ... that is given to everyone on earth, from the beginning of time until He brings an end to this age.

## *Sin*

The Apostle Paul wrote the Christians in Roman about sin and the law. Paul told them that we should not continue to sin because we have grace.

**Rom 6:15 NIV** - *What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!*

In today's church we seem to be afraid of talking about sin. This seems very odd, since Jesus and the writers of the New Testament made it a point to discuss the topic openly and frequently. We can all agree that we were destined for destruction because of sin. Sadly, this is where unity in the Body of Christ ends and the debating begins.

We see a rising acceptance of sin within the Body of Christ and a decreasing value of obeying God's commands, as though obeying God is legalism and talking about anything but God's grace within Christian circles is somehow insulting grace. The fact of the matter is that we are to confess our sins and remain firm in Jesus, rejecting sin and the schemes of the devil.



Willful sin is rebellion against God and not His desire for our lives. Now it is true that if we confess our sins, and truly have a heart of repentance, He is faithful to forgive us. But we should keep in mind that we should have true repentance, meaning we are willing to turn away from sin in our lives and allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives to help us overcome sin. The key element is the Holy Spirit helping us to overcome our sinful nature. The Apostle Paul says it this way:

**Rom 12:1 NIV** - *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.*

God did not say to “offer your lives up as slaves to sin, but covered with His grace”. He gave us the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to empower us to overcome sin in our lives, not to cover up willful sin over and over again. We are not made perfect at the point of salvation, but our hearts are circumcised by the spirit of God in order to receive His perfect law of love. We then work out our salvation by love to God by not willfully sinning and loving our neighbors. Both of those great commands require action and not just faith.

## *Miserable Principles*

Now we can effectively talk about what “weak and miserable principles” Paul was talking about. Some say that is the law, as to incite that “Do not Murder”, “Do not steal”, and that many other commands in the Torah are weak and miserable principles ... no, of course not. Commands are not principles. Much of the law is in fact righteous, good and spiritual. The Prophet Jeremiah and Apostle Paul wrote about the new covenant and the value God put on His commands .. he wrote them on our heart so we would follow them:

**Rom 2:14-15 NIV** - *(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)*

**Jer 31:33 NIV** - *"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.*

So, what shall we say the weak and miserable principles are that Paul is warning against? Paul goes on to say that if you embrace these principles the cross is of no use to you and that the Galatians are even being foolish to follow this type of doctrine. Here is a list of what Paul was referring to as weak and miserable principles:

1. Sacrificing animals for the forgiveness of sin or as an offerings pleasing to God (Isaiah 66:3)

**Isa 66:3 NIV** - *But whoever sacrifices a bull is like one who kills a man, and whoever offers a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; whoever makes a grain offering is like one who presents pig's blood, and whoever burns memorial incense, like one who worships an idol. They have chosen their own ways, and their souls delight in their abominations;*





2. Circumcision as a requirement for salvation and probably as a prerequisite to be God's children (Deu 30:6)



**Deu 30:6 NIV** - *The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.*

**Rom 2:29 NIV** - *No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.*

**1Cr 7:19 NIV** - *Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.*

3. Cleaning the outside of the body and not the inside (not to saying bathing is bad)

**Mat 23:25-26 NIV** - *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.*



4. Required rituals for pleasing worship acceptable by God (i.e. a specified place and time)



**Jhn 4:21 NIV** - *Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.*

**Jhn 4:23 NIV** - *Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.*

5. Observance of special days in order to be righteous (yes, even Sunday)

**Gal 4:10-11 NIV** - *You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.*

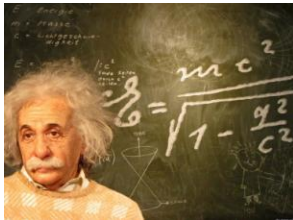
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**Rom 14:5-6 NIV** - *One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.*

6. Doing good in order to be loved by God

We discussed this topic earlier in the article.

7. Special knowledge to know God



**Eph 3:19 NIV** - *and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

8. Special allegiances to a ministry, prophet, or leader to be in God's will for your life

**Mat 27:51 NIV** - *At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.*

**Mar 15:38 NIV** - *The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*

There certainly can be lots of argument about this final topic. The work at the cross was so we could have a personal relationship with our savior. The above scriptures mentioned how the curtain in the temple was tore in two. The curtain represented a separation of the dwelling place of God with the people of God, except for the priesthood. God gives us ministries, prophets, teachers and others to help us along our journey, but not to be the curtain between us and our heavenly Father.



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